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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000322

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ROME FOR FAO REPRESENTATIVE
ANKARA FOR AG COUNSELOR
GENEVA FOR HEALTH ATTACHE

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [KFLU](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PROMISES TO DO MORE ON AVIAN
INFLUENZA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RENO L. HARNISH III; REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a February 24 meeting with the Ambassador and USAID and UNICEF representatives, Deputy Prime Minister for Agriculture (and head of the presidential avian influenza commission) Abbas Abbasov showed a new interest in serious measures to address the issue. He indicated that the AI commission had met on February 17 and agreed to a preliminary action plan. A February 28 commission meeting would finalize a detailed action plan for the GOAJ. In addition, DPM Abbasov noted several other GOAJ initiatives, such as the allocation of USD 550,000 from a reserve fund for equipment and supplies. Abbasov also agreed to the Ambassador's suggestion to establish a weekly working group meeting between donor representatives and commission staff to coordinate assistance. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On February 24, the Ambassador, along with USAID Country Coordinator and UNICEF Country Director Hanaa Singer, called on DPM Abbas Abbasov to discuss the GOAJ's response to avian influenza. The Ambassador began by noting ongoing concern over the GOAJ's approach to AI. He stressed the urgent need for an active, rather than passive, surveillance process throughout Azerbaijan. In addition, a detailed GOAJ action plan was needed in order to coordinate better donor assistance efforts. At the same time, a broad public information campaign, including materials made available from USAID and UNICEF, was needed. The Ambassador suggested that one way to improve GOAJ cooperation with the donor community was to meet weekly to communicate needs and information.

¶3. (SBU) A clearly defensive DPM Abbasov stressed that the GOAJ was "very much concerned" about AI and recapped mitigation efforts to date. He indicated that over 2,062 birds had been sampled throughout Azerbaijan. The GOAJ had sent 66 of these samples abroad for testing (54 to the Weybridge UK laboratory and 12 to a facility in Ukraine; Post has not determined what this Ukrainian facility is, but is confident that it is not/not an internationally recognized reference laboratory). At the same time, the GOAJ was working with donors such as the World Bank to reallocate USD 5 million into a new AI project in Azerbaijan. In addition, the GOAJ would provide roughly USD 8 million for the State Veterinary Service in the 2006 budget. This sum would be supplemented with USD 900,000 from the State Oil Fund and a further USD 550,000 from a GOAJ reserve fund for use in purchasing equipment and supplies. The GOAJ was also contemplating a system of "approved shops" in which poultry would be offered for sale with "avian influenza free"

certification.

¶4. (SBU) Abbasov indicated that he planned to tour southern Azerbaijan, site of many suspicious bird die-offs, beginning February 25. He admitted that some regional ex-comms (governors) had not been serious about tackling suspected AI cases. He had corrected this deficiency by sending veterinary officials out to meet local officials. Meanwhile, a February 17 AI commission meeting had produced a GOAJ action plan, a copy of which Abbasov provided to the Ambassador. Abbasov added that a February 28 commission meeting would examine specific mitigation proposals from various line ministries and generate a new and more comprehensive action plan. (NOTE: The February 17 action plan is more a general call for proposals from ministries than a set of concrete steps. END NOTE.) The commission had begun to issue daily statements on the situation. However, Abbasov said, television channels had been more active in creating fear. Abbasov related that he contacted each television channel, stressing that "all announcements on avian influenza should be coordinated with the state commission." The Ambassador pointed out that these alleged media inaccuracies made it doubly important that the GOAJ engage in a credible public awareness campaign.

¶5. (SBU) Abbasov turned next to the Ambassador's proposal to begin weekly working group meetings between donors' representatives and commission staff. He shared the Ambassador's view that such meetings would better coordinate international assistance and GOAJ needs, and agreed to begin holding such sessions. He also reiterated his wish to continue cooperation with the U.S., promising to instruct GOAJ experts to accompany USG experts to the field "at any time." The Ambassador reaffirmed the international community's readiness to provide technical assistance and

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training for Azerbaijan's ongoing efforts.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: After nearly two months of going around in circles with the GOAJ, DPM Abbasov's newfound candor and concern were welcome. This attitude gave us some hope that the GOAJ was slowly realizing the need for serious action. However, the GOAJ's disorganized attempts at sample collection and testing are still a weak link. This weakness includes a stubborn persistence in sending samples to CIS labs, such as Ukraine, that are not OIE reference facilities for avian influenza testing. With more donor assistance coming on line, it will now be critical for the GOAJ to come up with a workable action plan on February 28 to capitalize on the support of the international community. The GOAJ continues to lose valuable time, and public credibility. We will report on the action plan, once released, septel. END COMMENT.

HARNISH